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The Syracuse University motto, “Suos Cultores Scientia Coronat,” is Latin for “Knowledge crowns those who seek her.” Unfortunately, the quest for this knowledge may be hindered by certain physical barriers on the campus. The issue of accessibility is an important issue at Syracuse and a university that claims such diversity should always provide equal educational opportunities. The school of education’s website states, “in compliance with Section 508 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Syracuse University and the School of Education are committed to ensure that ‘no otherwise qualified individual with a disability…shall, solely by reason of disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity.’" Accessibility, according to the GNOME documentation library, is defined as “helping people with disabilities to participate in substantial life activities. That includes work, and the use of services, products, and information.” On campus, there are several buildings that are not fully accessible to people with disabilities and quite a few more that are difficult to access or require the disabled person to enter through a separate entrance that is often inconvenient. My outlook on this issue is that all buildings on the Syracuse University campus that are not easily accessible should be renovated to accommodate disabled people just as easily as those who are able bodied.

I will begin by pointing out the obvious fact that not all buildings on the Syracuse campus are fully and comfortably accessible. Because of this, the educational opportunities of the disabled are therefore being thwarted. But, is it necessary to renovate these buildings? And should the buildings that have aesthetic architectural value be updated at all? It is also debatable whether certain buildings that have separate entrances for the disabled should be remodeled as well to rid of the exclusion that people with disabilities are faced with.

Most buildings on the Syracuse campus are fully accessible, but quite a few require the person with the disability to enter through a separate, often inconvenient entrance. Some of the entrances are not far at all from those that incorporate stairs, but others are so inconvenient and at some points even embarrassing to use. For example, the engineering building, Edwin A. Link Hall, located on the quad of the campus, has one of the most inconvenient accessible entrances of any building on campus that I have seen. The person who cannot access the building by climbing stairs at either of the two main entrances must travel three quarters of the way around the building to the side adjacent to the parking lot. Here, there is a barely noticeable entrance because the area also functions as a loading dock. Apart from being problematic to locate, the entrance is unsightly and is simply upsetting. [LINK PHOTO] This is a classic example of exclusion. The needs and requirements of the physically handicapped are being neglected and not being taken seriously. In “Introduction to Geographies of Exclusion,” David Sibley writes, “Exclusions in social space may be unnoticed features of urban life. It is the fact that exclusions take place routinely, without most people noticing, which is a particularly important aspect of the problem.” The problems with accessibility in society often go unnoticed, which is extremely detrimental to the oppressed communities. But, it is surely possible that the university could renovate one of the two main entrances of Link hall to include some kind of ramp that will successfully accommodate anyone who may be disabled. Society needs to end the exclusion of the disabled, so it is therefore necessary to renovate any and all building on the Syracuse campus that do not successfully and comfortably accommodate all types of people.

But some members of society may argue against this assertion, stating that it is simply not feasible to create accessible entrances as facile as entrances for able-bodied people for certain buildings. Whether it is due to physical limitations or financial constraints. My concern with this argument is that it dismisses the fact that students need to utilize these buildings every day to gain their education. Also, one might think that for a community such as Syracuse, which is noteworthy for providing one of the most successful college atmospheres, the campus would make universal design a top priority.

But what if the buildings that “should be renovated” are historical? Should we update them anyway? Many building have historical status on campus, such as Crouse College and Carnegie Hall. According to ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG), a building does not need to be remodeled if the structure is designated as historic under an appropriate state or local law, or is listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The questions of whether these buildings should be changed are quite complex. For instance, Carnegie hall is accessible, but only to a certain extent. One who uses a wheelchair would enter through the door facing the parking lot because every other entrance incorporates stairwells. Oddly, this entrance does not lead to the same place as every other entrance does, so someone who is disabled must find and use the elevator to get up to the main floor. Also, the Carnegie library, which is very historical, is completely inaccessible to due to width limitations. The width between shelves is about two and one half and three feet wide, which could not accommodate a mid-sized wheelchair. [2 PHOTOS] One more point about Carnegie, is that there is a large, recessed study area, which incorporates ample space and high ceilings. This area is not at all handicapped accessible and is clearly a space where the university could take action and construct a ramp to facilitate accessibility. In my opinion, spaces like this study area should without a doubt be renovated and changed for the better. Also, one of the two main front entrances to the building should incorporate a ramp, so wheelchairs could access the first floor more easily. But, I will add that areas such as the Carnegie library would not be worth updating for specific reasons. Being that the structure is so historic and the space that would be modernized is very small anyway, it seems like renovation would be wasteful of time and an irrational use of university funds. In addition, services are readily available to anyone who may have trouble locating anything in any library throughout campus. With these qualifications, it seems unnecessary to remodel this particular space, but many other changes could quite possible be implemented.

One counter-argument could state simply that no such addition should be added to any historical building, but I would dismiss this assertion as closed-minded because it is truly necessary to incorporate universal design into already existing buildings. Also, for other historical buildings in general, it may be quite feasible to install certain aiding devices that could make a building accessible. These incorporations would not necessarily alter the structure of the building in any way, and would at most only minimally hinder the effect the aesthetics. These devices could even be removed for any necessary reason, and would successfully achieve the goal of accessibility.

In James Charlton’s “The dimensions of Disability Oppression,” he discusses how dominant culture, through socialization, power and many other factors, oppresses people of the disabled community. Dominant culture seems to indirectly use its power of majority to make accessibility less of an important factor. As exemplified through a few examples, some building on the Syracuse campus have accessibility problems. In one example the building was historic and in the other, the building was not. I will say that any building that is not historic should be updated to make the disabled person comfortable. It is not solely about being able to enter a building. It has more to do with having access to a building in the same way that everyone else does. When the matter comes to the historic buildings, it is necessary to modify them as well, but only to a certain extent. It is true in my opinion that certain aspects of a building may be better off if they were left in their original or current state.

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[Introduction to geographies of exlusion/sibley citation-don’t have the book with me]